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ABSTRACT

The District of Columbia Public Schools has established an Intern-Mentor Program to promote professional growth and development by using exemplary teachers to provide intensive assistance and guidance to new teachers. Experienced teachers, called "mentors," are released from their classroom duties for up to 2 years to provide assistance to new teachers, defined as having less than one full year of satisfactory teaching experience. All new teachers in the District of Columbia public schools will participate in the program. This booklet describes the program, including recruitment, subject matter testing, certification, selection and hiring, and evaluation of new teachers as interns. Topics discussed in relation to the experienced teachers as mentors include qualifications, selection and assignment, roles and responsibilities, professional development, and evaluation. (CB)

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District of Columbia Public Schools

INTERN ◊ MENTOR PROGRAM

Toward Excellence in Teaching

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Superintendent of Schools
Chief State School Officer

November 1985

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District of Columbia Public Schools

INTERN MENTOR PROGRAM

Toward Excellence in Teaching

November 1985
Washington, D.C.

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INTRODUCTION

The District of Columbia Public Schools' FY 1983-84 budget included $350,000 for a study, funded by request of the U.S. Congress, of viable methods to develop a "balanced and comprehensive system which will embrace the concepts of merit pay and exemplary teacher recognition . . . through both monetary and professional incentives."

The Superintendent's task force on merit pay for teachers, including teachers, administrators, parents, and community representatives, was appointed in November 1983. The task force met with national experts on teacher evaluation, reward, and incentive systems; reviewed the existing research on merit pay and other teacher incentive plans; and assessed the results of an independent study on teaching policies and conditions in the DC Public Schools.

In May 1984, the task force issued its report, entitled: *A Study of Teacher Incentives for the District of Columbia Public Schools*. Among the recommendations in the report was this proposal to establish an Intern-Mentor Program:

> *A new plan for selecting and inducting new teachers in the D.C. Public Schools should be developed to provide more rigorous screening and more intensive support.* Because new teachers will comprise increasingly large proportions of the DCPS teaching force over the next decade, improvement of teacher quality will increasingly depend on the District's ability to recruit, select, and retain qualified new teachers. Recruitment of talented new entrants will likely require increases in teachers' salaries and development of other recruitment incentives. At the same time, however, it will be important to ensure that new entrants are knowledgeable in their subject areas and can translate that knowledge into effective classroom teaching performance. To that end, certification and/or selection practices should incorporate examinations of subject matter knowledge as a condition of hiring, and all new teachers should fulfill a one-year internship under the guidance of an expert, experienced teacher in their subject matter area.

With this mandate, a special Intern-Mentor Program Task Force, composed of key administrators in the D.C. Public Schools and other educators closely related to the system, was appointed by the Superintendent in November 1984 to make recommendations for the development of a program for intern and mentor teachers to be implemented during the 1985-86 school year.

In December 1984, the Board of Education, acting on the recommendation of its Ad Hoc Committee on the Study of Incentives, endorsed the concept of the Intern-Mentor Program and mandated that all new teachers entering the school system in 1985-86 be required to serve a year-long internship under the guidance of an experienced mentor teacher.

PROGRAM PLAN

DESCRIPTION

The goal of the Intern-Mentor Program is to promote professional growth and development by utilizing exemplary teachers to provide intensive assistance and guidance to new teachers (defined as having less than one full year of satisfactory teaching experience) for the purpose of improving teaching and learning in the classroom.

To implement this goal, experienced teachers, called "mentors," are released from their classroom duties for up to two years to provide assistance to no more than 10 new teachers, called "interns," per year. Mentors devote substantial time to each intern, usually observing him or her at least once every two weeks and consulting more frequently on matters of planning, teaching techniques, identification of teaching materials, assessment of students, and classroom management. Mentor teacher positions involve additional compensation of $2,000 per year and $200 per year for teaching-assistance materials.

All new teachers in the D.C. Public Schools will participate in the Intern-Mentor Program, but it is expected that the majority of these teachers will enter the program as a direct result of the system's vigorous new recruiting effort to fill vacancies in secondary mathematics, science, and foreign languages; bilingual education; special education; and early childhood education.

Given the critical shortages in such areas, it is especially important that these new teachers receive the support, advice, and direction necessary to make their first year's experience as successful and meaningful as possible. Therefore, the Intern-Mentor Program is not an extension of college training or student teaching, but rather an on-the-job practicum where the realities of the classroom can be shared with experienced peers who still have their roots there. It is the responsibility of these mentors to coach, train, and finally participate in the evaluation of the classroom performance of the intern. For a successful program not only offers professional development to new teachers but also screens out those who show little aptitude for the classroom.

To ensure the program's maximum effectiveness, every attempt is made to match as closely as possible the subject area of the mentor with that of the intern. When disciplines cannot be satisfactorily matched, mentors are encouraged to call on subject area supervisors or department chairpersons for needed specialized services.

The internship is the first year of a two-year probationary period that the new teacher must complete before permanent tenure can be granted. During the second probationary year, the intern who has successfully completed the first year receives concentrated support from the building principal and appropriate department chairperson with periodic support from the first-year mentor. The intern who has been identified as needing continued intensive support from a mentor teacher repeats relevant components of the first-year internship.

STAFF

The Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Incentive Programs directs and manages the programmatic, fiscal, and research components of the Intern-Mentor Program assisted by a Program Analyst. The Intern-Mentor Program Coordinator is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the program.

Professional staff is supported by a central office assistant, a clerk/typist, and a clerk.

BUDGET

The Incentive Programs Office provides funding for central office staff including the Intern-Mentor Program Coordinator, salaries for fulltime mentors, and grant awards of $200 and an annual stipend of $2000 for each mentor. The Incentive Programs Office also provides funds for professional development activities and research and evaluation efforts intended to increase program effectiveness.

EVALUATION

A modified Discrepancy Model Evaluation System is utilized to determine the effectiveness of program objectives. This involves continuous and rigorous monitoring by the Incentive Programs Office through school visits, reporting requirements, and scheduled evaluation sessions with teachers and administrators associated with the program. Outside evaluations are also employed to assess program effectiveness.

NEW TEACHERS AS INTERNS

RECRUITMENT

The Intern-Mentor Program is taking several steps to develop a more effective and efficient system for the recruitment of new teachers:

- Establish a comprehensive system for projecting vacancies earlier in the school year and for keeping track of applicant files;
- Publicize vacancies widely and send recruiting teams to major teacher education institutions each spring to solicit applicants;
- Clarify and simplify the application process in order to avoid discouraging promising candidates;
- Review recruitment process data to determine if the residency requirement presents an obstacle to attracting new teachers to the system and, if necessary, make appropriate policy recommendations;
- Review salary and benefit provisions from comparable districts and give appropriate advice on their impact on the recruitment process.

CERTIFICATION

The following steps are being taken to improve certification procedures and practices:

- Publish and disseminate a brochure which describes DCPS teacher certification procedures;
- Revise certification and employment procedures and processes to enable intern candidates to be brought into the system in a timely manner.

SUBJECT MATTER TESTING

An integral part of the Intern-Mentor Program is the requirement that interns take a subject matter test in their teaching field. The first two classes of interns comprise the pilot groups for test development. In subsequent years, the tests will be used as part of the screening process for hiring new teachers.

All of the tests are criterion-referenced and competency-based. This means that the tests measure content knowledge and skills as defined by specific learning objectives. The criterion-referenced tests serve as an entry level measure of the teacher's mastery of the curriculum and content of the course of study pursued in obtaining a teaching degree.

The development of the testing program began with the identification of content areas for each subject matter test. The initial phase of test development and validation takes two years. Based on anticipated hiring needs, tests will be developed during the first year in the following five priority areas: secondary mathematics, science, and foreign languages; K-12 English as a second language (ESL); and K-12 special education. Additional tests to be developed during the first year in order to establish a comprehensive testing program include: secondary English and social studies; early childhood education; and elementary education. During the second year tests will be developed in K-12 bilingual education; secondary art, music, and health, physical education, athletics and safety; and other selected areas of teaching.

SELECTION AND HIRING

Current selection practices yield only a modest amount of information about the competence of prospective candidates, derived mainly from the review of paper qualifications and, sometimes, from impressions gained during interviews. The Intern-Mentor Program seeks to make this process more rigorous, and therefore more informative and helpful to the system, in a number of ways:

- Develop specific selection criteria for the induction of interns.
- Design a testing program in subject areas for the selection of interns.
- Recommend policy to the Board of Education to include testing as an employment requirement.
- Require that all new teachers successfully complete a subject matter (criterion referenced) test in their teaching field (for the first two years this test will be subject to a validation process).
- Carefully review a candidate's educational and employment credentials with a view to their quality and relevance and not merely the statistical satisfaction of basic requirements.
- Interview each candidate with provision for requiring a writing sample and, in selected cases, a demonstration of teaching competence.

PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

The intern's first year of teaching serves as a practicum experience during which he or she is assisted by a mentor teacher in reaching performance goals and delivering effective instructional programs for maximum student achievement. Beginning with orientation for new teachers before the opening of school, interns are provided with professional development activities throughout the school year aimed at addressing problems generally faced by teachers at the beginning of their careers.

Key practicum components include conferencing, goal-setting, multiple observations, continuous evaluations, and professional development. The success of the internship experience depends upon the collaborative efforts of the building principal and mentor. Each intern is assigned to a local school and given a regular caseload. The principal provides orientation about school policies and procedures and the mentor assists the intern in planning, selection of appropriate materials, teaching strategies, and classroom management.

To ensure skill development and program effectiveness, interns participate in professional development oriented around subjects of need and interest. Seminar topics for interns cover such areas as planning, class management, communication skills, instructional technology, and academic learning time.

EVALUATION

The intern is evaluated by both the mentor teacher and building principal. Their recommendations are forwarded to the appropriate review officers for decision on the renewal of the intern's contract for a second year.

EXPERIENCED TEACHERS AS MENTORS

QUALIFICATIONS

To be eligible to become a mentor teacher, a candidate must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Have permanent tenure in the District of Columbia Public Schools;
- Hold permanent certification in the subject or teaching area in which application is being made;
- Have a minimum of five years of successful teaching experience;
- Have at least two outstanding ratings within the last five years.

SELECTION AND ASSIGNMENT

A cadre of mentor teachers representing the major subject areas in which vacancies will occur in the next school year is selected and assigned to work intensively with new teachers in their respective fields. Initially, given the relatively small number of prospective new teachers and mentors, selection is to be centrally managed.

Selection of mentor teachers is conducted by a committee composed of administrators and teachers using a range of criteria such as: evidence of outstanding teaching ability, as demonstrated in prior evaluations; recommendations from supervisors and peers; subject matter expertise; commitment to teaching, as evidenced by continuing education and willingness to assume challenging assignments; and ability to work well with other staff.

Selection is from among those who apply for the positions with consideration given to ensuring that all major teaching areas are represented in approximately the proportions needed to match the teaching areas of the interns. A slight surplus of mentors is usually selected to allow for the fact that new teachers will undoubtedly be unequally distributed across subject areas and regions and to allow for additional intern assignments in the event of late hiring. Mentors are called into "active duty" as needed, with the amount of released time granted proportionate to the number of interns assigned. Normally, the position of mentor is a fulltime one with each mentor being assigned approximately 10 interns. In cases where there are not enough interns in a particular subject area to justify a fulltime mentor, a parttime position may be established with the mentor being released from his or her classroom duties on a one-third to one-half basis. Appointment to mentor teaching positions is for two years. Upon completion of a term as mentor, the teacher returns to his or her original assignment. Mentors are not allowed to apply for administrative positions during their two-year term.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The mentor teacher is responsible for assessing the intern's needs, identifying the problem areas, developing appropriate strategies to meet those needs, and consulting frequently with the intern as well as, when appropriate, with the school principal to increase the intern's ability to perform effectively as a classroom teacher. In carrying out these responsibilities the mentor will:

Provide classroom assistance to the intern in the delivery of his/her instructional program

- Assist the intern in planning, preparing, and conducting classroom instruction;
- Observe, analyze, and provide feedback on the intern's delivery of his/her instructional program;
- Advise the intern on strategies to maintain effective classroom discipline;
- Demonstrate the elements of effective instruction;
- Assist the intern in developing methods to appropriately evaluate student progress;
- Suggest ways to reduce the intern's paperwork burden.

Assist the intern in acquiring materials and other resources

- Determine the availability of supplies and equipment in the school;
- Work with identified school staff to develop a plan for the use of available materials;
- Provide brochures, lists, catalogs, etc. of places/persons within and outside the school system to contact for resources;
- Secure school handbook and other documents relevant to the system's and school building's policies and procedures;
- Obtain copies of CBC curriculum guides in the intern's subject area(s).

Participate in the supervision of the intern

- Establish a constructive intern-mentor relationship designed to enhance communication and the exchange of ideas;
- Use the supervisory tool of script taping to improve the intern's teaching techniques;
- Schedule periodic classroom visits with follow-up conferences based on joint planning of specific objectives;
- Discuss and put into practice techniques and/or strategies to improve areas of need;
- Assist the intern to develop a repertoire of effective teaching responses;
- Identify the intern's effective and less effective teaching responses and provide assistance where needed.

Encourage the professional development of the intern

- Assess the intern's professional development needs;
- Identify professional development opportunities that will enhance the intern's subject area knowledge and/or pedagogical skills;
- Disseminate information about and arrange for the intern's attendance at workshops, seminars, inservice training, and other educational offerings;
- Inform the intern of incentive and other relevant grant information.

Participate in the evaluation of the intern

- Document and assess the intern's progress in all areas of teaching performance over the course of the internship period;
- Inform the principal periodically of the intern's progress;
- Provide the intern with evaluation feedback in accordance with the required schedule in the Intern-Mentor Program Evaluation System;
- Participate in the completion and submission of required evaluation forms on time.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development began with a professional development institute for mentor teachers in the summer of 1985. The institute addresses the importance of the mentor's role in instructional supervision, support, and evaluation of the intern. Additional duties and responsibilities of the mentor are also presented.

Mentor teachers continue professional development during the school year with formal and informal meetings and visits. Workshops and seminars are held to provide mentor teachers with skills and competencies in classroom management, discipline, instructional support, curriculum planning, and improvement of student performance.

EVALUATION

Mentors do not receive a rating in the same way as other teachers, except that part-time and inactive mentors, who continue to have classroom teaching responsibilities, are evaluated in the normal manner for their teaching. The purpose of the evaluation system for mentor teachers is to provide insights which will help improve "mentoring" activities, rather than to provide a standardized rating of performance. Thus, the evaluation process will address features of the Intern-Mentor Program as well as aspects of individual mentor performance.

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